

The Many... and the Only

Luke 4:23-30

Jesus has just read in the synagogue in Nazareth from the book of Isaiah where the Messiah is said to bring 'good news,' deliverance to the captives, and sight to the blind. He then sat down and said, *"The Scripture is today fulfilled in your ears."* In other words, *'I am He who was promised'*- the Messiah. Some began 'thinking' to themselves, "Wait a second. Prove it! (Heal thyself). Do here what you did up north!" Jesus then gave a response using a Jewish proverb: *"No prophet is accepted in his own country"* (v. 24). Then Jesus tells two stories with a point. Let me say that again. He tells two stories with a *major* point.

(1). The start of Jesus stories indicates its importance "I say to you in truth" (NAS); "But I tell you of a truth" (KJV); "I assure you" (NIV). These phrases translate just one Hebrew word; the same Greek word. It is a word often used by the Jewish writers, going all the way back to Moses on Mount Sinai. *It signifies that which is most true, sure, and firm, and to be depended on.* Do you know what the word is? Amen. He put the Amen before the story. Anytime the Amen goes before the story, you know it's important.

(2). The subjects of Jesus' story indicate its importance. They are the Jewish prophets Elisha and Elijah. Some might say, "But the widow at Zarephath and the leper are the subjects!" No. They are the objects. In other words, the Jews in Jesus hometown are saying to Him; "Do for us what you've done elsewhere!" Jesus answers: "Amen! What I'm about to tell you is sure and firm; an oath that can be depended on.

Here's the point: *Kingdom builders will sometimes disappoint those who are comfortably religious.* The two stories are similar in one important way: The use of phrase *"the many"* and the word *"only."* In Elijah's day, there were **many widows in Israel** (v. 25), but Elijah was sent to **only** to Zarephath (v. 26). In Elisha's day, there were **many lepers in Israel** (v. 27), but Elisha was sent **only** to Naaman (v. 27). Zarephath was a Gentile area, and the widow of in Sidon was a Gentile. So, too, Naaman was a Gentile. The reason the synagogue went into a rage was because the synagogue people didn't like the message.

I. Kingdom builders are always interested in *the one*, never impressed by *the many*.

Religious people seem to always be infatuated with size. Bigger is better. Truth be known, the Kingdom of God advances one person at a time. It's one man; one woman; one child; one person. Imagine the effort, the work, the time involved in reaching the widow and Naaman the Syrian. It reminds me of the Shepherd who leaves the ninety and nine sheep to go after the one lost lamb.

II. Kingdom progress is when *the one begins to change*, even when *the many remain the same*.

Notice the emphasis in this text is on the transformation of one leper, and the rescue of one widow. The world around you may seem hopeless and desperate, but the Kingdom progresses one by one. I think that was illustrated to me the other day when I sat outside the house and visited with a man whose life has been radically turned around by the power of God. I thought to myself as I drove away, "That's what progress in the Kingdom looks like." Too often we get so macro, we miss the magnitude of the micro. May we realize that loving God is seen in strengthening one person.

III. Kingdom enemies rage when *they don't get their way*, but *the Kingdom is here to stay*.

It's obvious that the message of Jesus did not go over well. The entire congregation in the synagogue became so angry that they sought to kill Jesus. However, no amount of opposition can stop Him. So it is with Kingdom work. There's no reason to be concerned. No matter what is going on around you, when you have an eye for the one to whom you're sent, you are fulfilling God's call on your life.